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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000213

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SUBJECT: FORMER DPRK INTERNAL POLICE OFFICIAL ON KIM JONG
IL SECURITY, GROWING DOMESTIC DISCONTENT

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Former DPRK People's Safety Agency (PSA) official Kwak Myung-il described domestic surveillance activities in North Korea, security measures for Kim Jong Il train travel, and growing public discontent with the DPRK regime during a recent meeting with poloff. Kwak and his nephew had escaped from Hwanghae Province to South Korea in 2007 by boat across the Northern Limit Line (NLL). Public expressions of anti-regime sentiment had become so commonplace in North Korea the authorities were unable to punish offenders as severely as before, said Kwak, who had had access to official domestic surveillance reports as PSA Director of Economic Inspections in Hwanghae. According to one internal report, DPRK domestic security personnel confiscated between 300 and 400 thousand DVDs nationwide in a recent year, Kwak said. Responsible for checking homes for illegal radios and trying to shoot down propaganda leaflet-laden balloons from the South, Kwak himself had watched South Korean television broadcast across the DMZ before defecting and said many of his PSA colleagues had kept radios they confiscated for personal use. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Presently working for the small, conservative South Korean newspaper "Future Korea," Kwak Myung-il also serves the recently-founded elite defector group "North Korea Intellectuals Solidarity" as head of its information analysis team. In North Korea, the 37-year-old Kwak had spent 11 years with the PSA in Hwanghae Province performing domestic surveillance and inspections until his defection in 2007 following the execution of his uncle, a Korea Worker's Party (KWP) officer, and imprisonment of his aunt and cousins.

KJI Security Detail

13. (C) One of the PSA's responsibilities, Kwak said, was providing for Kim Jong Il's security when he traveled domestically. On occasions when he moved by train, undercover personnel would take positions at points every 50 meters along the tracks. Trip lines made of fishing line attached to alarm bells were strung along the rails, too. Any problems would prompt personnel to signal the train. Other undercover agents would check residential and public areas along the train's route. Kwak himself had been involved with providing train security on two occasions: in 2000 in Hwanghae and in 2002 when Kim Jong Il traveled to Russia.

Internal Investigations

¶4. (C) In addition to cooperative farms, state companies, and labor camps, the PSA conducted inspections and surveillance of residential areas and markets, looking for illegal radios, among other things. In October, 2000, Kim Jong Il had instructed the agency to form a team tasked with cracking down on sources of outside information. Kwak said his colleagues sometimes kept confiscated radios for personal use. PSA agents looked for illicit DVDs as well. In fact, according to an internal DPRK report, between 300 and 400 thousand DVDs had been confiscated nationwide during a recent year. DVDs of U.S. movies were very popular, Kwak said, commanding market prices of up to 20 times those of North Korean movies. The punishment for possession of U.S. movies was lighter than for South Korean movies, usually nothing more than confiscation and a verbal reprimand. More severe penalties were reserved for reproduction and distribution of illegal DVDs. A man in Nampo had been executed for burning more than 2,000 DVD copies.

¶5. (C) The PSA had on occasion been called upon to respond to balloons from South Korea carrying propaganda leaflets. Once, Kwak was instructed to shoot down the balloons, though this had proven to be difficult. In Kwak's opinion the leaflets were an effective propaganda tool as natural curiosity prompted people to read them in spite of the danger of being caught. In addition, North Koreans were inclined to accept the veracity of Kim Jong Il family tree diagrams on the leaflets, he said, as they did not trust the North Korean regime. Even KWP officials did not believe ten percent of what the regime told them, Kwak later added, but followed along because of the constant threat of punishment.

Discontent Growing

¶6. (C) As economic difficulties continued and more information came in from the outside world, public discontent in North Korea was growing, Kwak said. Whereas before, the DPRK regime exercised control through the Public Distribution System (PDS), now that system did not function as well and people experienced greater economic hardship. In the past, such difficulties were blamed on U.S. sanctions and other external factors, but people no longer believed this, having heard that South Korea was now a world leader in information technology.

¶7. (C) In his position with the PSA, Kwak had received surveillance reports about public expressions of criticism of the regime and noted that comments were harsher than before. Because such expressions had become so common, authorities were unable to mete out the same level of punishment as before. People could even insult Kim Jong Il in public with impunity, Kwak said. In addition, political prison camps such as the one at Yoduk were filled beyond capacity, so it was less common to imprison the family members of offenders who did receive punishment.

¶8. (C) There had been considerable public discontent with restrictions on market activity introduced in June 2005, Kwak confirmed. This was true even in the coastal city of Haeju, where residents had the option of supplementing their diets with seafood. Presumably, discontent was greater still in inland areas.

Escape

¶9. (C) Kwak's uncle and father had served, respectively, in the KWP Investigations Department and Strategy Department. In charge of soliciting information and assistance from South Koreans, Kwak's uncle had been to Seoul, Kwak said, adding that North Korean agents now trained their focus on South Korean businessmen in China. The uncle and other senior

staff in his office had been purged in the wake of a money scandal. After his uncle was executed and his cousins and aunt sent to a prison camp, Kwak decided to defect.

¶10. (C) Kwak and his nephew left the Haeju area in a small, two-person vessel. To discourage defections by sea, North Korean authorities allowed only very slow boats in the area, but Kwak had bought a Chinese three-horsepower engine to supplement the boat's power once at sea. He and his nephew headed for the NLL, knowing they could be fired upon by North Korean monitors once they approached. Mistakenly thinking that Chinese fishing boats in the NLL vicinity were there with South Korean permission, Kwak boarded one, hoping the boat would take the two to South Korea. Instead, the fishermen on board put a knife to his throat. Kwak jumped overboard, swam back to his boat and waiting nephew, and continued on to Yongpyon-do, a South Korean island.

Dissatisfaction with ROK, Advice to U.S.

¶11. (C) Kwak had learned something of South Korea through television news programs and dramas broadcast to southern parts of the DPRK from South Korea and had heard about the South Korean defector transition facility "Hanawon." Like many defectors, he was nevertheless surprised at the competition and capitalism in South Korea, though he professed a determination to overcome any obstacles to succeeding in Seoul. He saw a need for South Korea to formulate a better system of looking out for defectors, who were subject, he said, to salary and contract discrimination. Government figures and others used defectors to achieve political aims, he continued, and churches collected donations that were ostensibly for defectors, but were never distributed.

¶12. (C) Regarding relations with the DPRK, Kwak thought both the U.S. and ROK had been too generous. While the U.S. and ROK viewed the DPRK as a potential dialogue partner, North Korea negotiated with the U.S. as an enemy. Kwak advised

that the U.S. always bear this in mind and never give in to Pyongyang.
STEPHENS